

## JERUSALEM IN JEWISH TRADITION & HISTORY by Rabbi David Rosen

While the city of Shalem is mentioned in Genesis in connection with Abraham and his meeting with Melchizedek of that city, the full name Jerusalem (together with its synonym Zion) enters onto the Biblical stage in connection with David and its establishment as his royal city (II Samuel 5:5-9), serving as the capital around which all the tribes of Israel are united. However it is the erection of the Temple by David's son Solomon (I Kings 6) that endows the city with holiness, in accordance with the instruction given to the children of Israel recorded in the book of Deuteronomy 12, v.5 concerning the place for sacred offerings:

"And you shall come there...to the place which the Lord your God will choose from amongst all your tribes to place His Name there" (cf. II Kings 21:4).

Accordingly the people would come up from far and wide in pilgrimage to the city, to the Temple – three times a year – on the Festivals of Passover, Pentecost and Tabernacles as commanded in Deuteronomy 16:16.

The unique sanctity of the Temple site not only invested the whole city with a special holiness, but also lent to its identification in tradition with major Biblical events, not least of all Abraham's binding of his son before God on the mountain in the land of Moriah as narrated in Genesis 22. Thus the Temple Mount is known as Mt. Moriah as we find in (see II Chronicles 3:1). Reflecting the emanation of holiness from the Temple Mount to the city as a whole, the other name for the mount – Zion – was used to embrace the whole of Jerusalem (cf. I Kings 8:1 ; Isaiah 1:27). This extended relationship is perhaps most powerfully expressed in Solomon's prayer at the dedication of the Temple, (I Kings, ch. 8), where he speaks of the various persons, Israelites and foreigners; as well as the various opportunities, that will bring people to the Temple or make them focus their minds and hearts on it from elsewhere. In verse 44 Solomon speaks of

"they (who) will pray to the Lord, via the city which You have chosen, and the house which I have built for Your Name".

The greatness and splendor of Jerusalem are described in the Bible in hyperbolic poetic imagery, such as in the Psalms - "beautiful in elevation, the joy of all the earth" (Psalm 48:3) and "perfection of beauty, the joy of all the earth" (Lamentations 2:15); and in the Song of Songs (6:4), the beloved is compared to Jerusalem as the symbol of beauty and loveliness. Similarly in the "Songs of Ascents" (Ps. 122, 125, and 132) the pilgrims praise Jerusalem in hyperbole.

Whereas mention has been made of how the whole city becomes an extension of the Temple Mount, in Psalm 137, "Zion" and "Jerusalem" become symbols of the whole land. Similarly, the name and the concept of Jerusalem are frequently employed in prophetic literature to represent the whole of Judah. Indeed Jerusalem embodies the conduct and the deeds of the people of Judah and is identified with them, as well as with the whole of Israel, for good or ill.

The destruction of the Temple and Jerusalem with it (5&6 B.C.E.), are thus seen in the Hebrew Bible as the ultimate catastrophe and in the ominous term "the day of Jerusalem" in the book of Lamentations, the city symbolizes the humiliation of the land,

the people and their exile, so graphically described in that book. Accordingly the weeping exiles by the rivers of Babylon declare

"If I forget you O Jerusalem let my right hand forget its ability. Let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth if I do not remember you, if I do not raise Jerusalem above my greatest joy".

Nevertheless, destruction and exile are seen only as a temporary situation and prophetic literature expresses the total trust in Divine Love and commitment to His eternal promise in keeping with Leviticus 26:44-45, that will ultimately bring about the city's restoration and reunification with the people. Accordingly the chapters of consolation in the book of Isaiah (chapters 40 to 66), contain an abundance of expression of fervent love for Zion and Jerusalem on the one hand and on the other, descriptions in hyperbolic poetic style of its anticipated future greatness and splendor, with its expected restoration. The Prophetic view of an exalted future for Jerusalem includes both physical splendor and a sublime religious-spiritual significance referring both to the near future and to the end of days. In Jeremiah's detailed vision of the rebuilt Jerusalem, (chapters 30 and 31,) not only the Temple but the whole city will be "sacred to the Lord. Ezekiel (chapters 45 & 48) to an even greater degree endows this vision of the restored Holy City with a transcendent aspect in which the whole city, entirely sanctified to God as the abode of the Divine Presence, will be called "The Lord is there". The vision of Zechariah recorded in the eighth chapter of the book (v. 3-5) looks towards that day when Jerusalem will be called "the faithful city, and the mountain of the Lord of Hosts, the holy mountain", and once again its "streets will be filled with old men and old women and boys and girls will play there". However later on in chapter fourteen (v.16-21) his vision goes even beyond that of Ezekiel viewing the sanctity of the city of the Temple as having a universal nature which will be recognized by all the nations serving as international focus for universal pilgrimage. This is in keeping with the vision of Isaiah, echoed by Micah, in which the place named "the mountain of the House of the Lord" and "the House of the God of Jacob" are identified with Zion, Jerusalem, from whence learning, justice and peace will emanate to all the nations.

Jewish Tradition ascribes seventy names to Jerusalem, attesting to her spiritual significance and beauty. As mentioned, Tradition identifies Jerusalem/the Temple Mount with the central events of Biblical history. Not only was it here that Abraham demonstrated his supreme dedication to God, but Creation itself began here. The foundation stone, "even hashetiyah" of the Temple, was considered the centre of the world from whence Creation had commenced and the place from which the earth for the creation of the first human being was taken. Furthermore this site is also identified with the place of Jacob's dream (which he had on his journey from home when fleeing from his brother Esau) in which he received Divine revelation and promise (Genesis 28:11-22). Moreover in rabbinic Judaism, Jerusalem acquires further cosmic significance both as the divine footstool underneath God's throne (and thus as the natural fulcrum, as it were, of spiritual energy in the world) and also as a mirror image of the Heavenly Jerusalem that will eventually be united with the earthly Jerusalem. The ultimate expression of this global vision is embodied in the messianic hope for the ingathering of the exiles and universal peace with the establishment of the Divine Kingdom on Earth.

While under Persian imperial rule a partial restoration of Jerusalem and the Temple took place with the return of the exiles under the leadership of Ezra and Nehemiah; it

was during the Hasmonean dynasty that the city flourished as the independent political and religious center of the Jewish People.

Jerusalem continued to grow as a Jewish center under Roman rule, but the memory of past sovereignty, the hope for full restoration and repressive actions on the part of the authorities led to various clashes that culminated in the Jewish rebellion, the Roman siege on Jerusalem and the destruction of the city together with the Second Temple in 70 C.E. The temporary successful Bar Kochba rebellion in 132 C.E. rekindled Jewish hopes for the restoration of Jerusalem. However these were brutally and effectively extinguished by the Romans three years later, ushering in another exile that lasted almost two millennia.

Once again Jerusalem served as the focus of Jewish hopes and dreams for messianic deliverance and became a symbol and personification not only of the desolate land but of the desolate people.

These expectations that placed their trust in Divine mercy and promise, found their expression in the daily and weekly prayer services as well as in grace after every meal. The mention of Jerusalem was obligatory in all the statutory prayers, and again it is largely used as a synonym for the Land of Israel as a whole. The most important of the many references is the 14<sup>th</sup> blessing of the daily *Amidah* prayer, which is entirely devoted to Jerusalem. It begins

"and to Jerusalem Your city, return in mercy ... rebuild it soon in our days"  
and concludes, "Blessed are You, O Lord, who builds Jerusalem."

On the Ninth of Av, the anniversary of the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple, a moving prayer of comfort to "the mourners of Zion and the mourners of Jerusalem" and for the rebuilding of the city is added to this blessing in the *Amidah* prayer in the afternoon service, and the concluding blessing is changed to refer to He "who comforts Zion and rebuilds Jerusalem." The seventeenth blessing of the *Amidah* is an invocation for the restoration of the sacrificial system, which concludes with the words

"and may our eyes behold Your return in mercy to Zion. Blessed are You, O Lord, who restores Your Divine Presence unto Zion."

The same combination of prayer for Jerusalem with the hope for the restoration of the Divine Service in the Temple is the theme of the fourth blessing of the additional service on the New Moon and Festivals. The Sabbath additional service refers to the return to "our land" and the additional prayer for the New Moon and Festivals includes a prayer for "the remembrance of Jerusalem Your holy city."

The third benediction of the Grace after Meals is largely devoted to Jerusalem and includes prayers for Jerusalem/Zion, the restoration of the Davidic dynasty, and the rebuilding of the Temple. It concludes with the same benediction as the 14<sup>th</sup> blessing of the *Amidah*, but with the addition of the Hebrew word meaning "in Your mercy".

Arguably the most striking phrase in the liturgy concerning Jerusalem is to be found in the blessing that Jews continue to recite after the Scriptural readings in the Sabbath morning service:-

"Have mercy on Zion, O Lord, for she is *the house of our life*. And deliver the grieving soul (i.e. the people of Israel) speedily in our days. Blessed are You O Lord who makes Zion rejoice with her children."

The memory, meaning and hope of Jerusalem is similarly sustained in the Hebrew calendar, and not only on the fast days that commemorate Jerusalem's devastation – above all the ninth of Av – when Jews mourning the destruction of the Temples recite the Book of Lamentations and various special laments composed over the ages mourning the destruction of Jerusalem and praying for its restoration. For no matter how far away from Jerusalem Jews may be and no matter what season it may be there, the calendar that determines their liturgical year and its festivals, celebrates the agricultural seasons of Zion. Moreover, in addition to facing towards Jerusalem for all prayer, the order of the Temple offerings are still recited as they were offered up on each calendar occasion, almost two millennia ago. Furthermore, at the conclusion of the two most prominent religious ceremonies in the Hebrew calendar; the holiest day of the Jewish year, the Day of Atonement, when Jews fast for twenty five hours; and the Passover meal celebrating the seminal festival of Jewish life and history, Jews continue to recite the words that nurtured the vision of return through the generations – "leshanah haba'ah biYerushalayim" – next year in Jerusalem. Similarly the wedding ceremony is usually concluded with the breaking of a glass in memory of the destruction of Jerusalem; and indeed the blessings of the ceremony express the hope of the city's rejuvenation through the return of the exiles so that in keeping with the vision of Isaiah, "in the cities of Judah and the streets of Jerusalem, the sound of joy and the sound of happiness, the sound of the groom and the sound of the bride shall be heard."

Recognition of the unequalled sanctity of Jerusalem was also maintained in Jewish religious consciousness as it continues to be today, through restricting certain prayers and religious rituals to Jerusalem alone, thus heightening the ideal of living in the city. However, many who were unable to realize this goal were sent for burial in Jerusalem (in particular to the Mount of Olives), both so that their final resting place should be on holy ground and above all to await the ultimate messianic resurrection at the center stage of those final events.

Despite the fact that the majority of Jews lived outside the Land of Israel, a continuous presence remained and sought above all to live in Jerusalem awaiting messianic deliverance. However under Byzantine rule Jews were usually prohibited from living in Jerusalem altogether and were only allowed to visit on the anniversary of the Temple's destruction to mourn its loss and reveal their humiliation.

Jewish collaboration with the Persian conquerors of Jerusalem in 614 C.E. led to a temporary Jewish rule of the city. However with Jerusalem's reconquest by Heraclius in 629 C.E. Jews were again banished. Limited Jewish return to the city was allowed under Muslim rule and improved substantially during the Umayyad period. But in 1099 the Crusaders conquered Jerusalem and massacred the Muslim and Jewish

populations. Most of the latter perished in their synagogues which were set on fire and burnt to the ground.

Jewish life in Jerusalem had its ups and downs during subsequent Muslim rule but generally the local Jewish community depended on charitable donations from their sister communities around the world who viewed such philanthropy as an obligatory testimony of their religious commitment to Jerusalem. A continuous small number of Jews braved the severe difficulties both of reaching Jerusalem and living in it, including many notable figures such as Nachmanides who fled to Jerusalem from Spain in the 13<sup>th</sup> Century. However such immigration became more feasible during Ottoman rule even though the latter maintained a quota for the number of Jews living in the city. In the 17<sup>th</sup> century Jerusalem began to flourish as a center for Jewish scholarship and study of Jewish mysticism. A very large group of immigrants for that time – some five hundred – came from Poland under the leadership of Rabbi Judah the Pious.

The significant change in Jerusalem's fortunes emerged from the political interest in the region among the European powers in the nineteenth century that increased with the growing decline of the Ottoman Empire. The European support for "religious immigration" served to assist the increase of the Jewish community to the degree that by the middle of the nineteenth century, according to Baedeker's Guide, more Jews were living in Jerusalem than either Muslims or Christians. Immigration to the Holy Land was of course greatly galvanized by the emergence of the Zionist movement which sought to reestablish Jewish sovereignty in the historical homeland of the Jewish People.

Accordingly the twentieth century saw the remarkable revitalization of Jewish life in Jerusalem, both during the British mandate period and with the establishment of the State of Israel. However in the latter's War of Independence, while successful on most fronts, the Jewish fighters were defeated by the Jordanian Legion and the other Arab forces fighting in Jerusalem and the whole Jewish population of the Old City was expelled. Notwithstanding the armistice agreement allowing for Jewish access to the Western Wall, the Jordanians erected a concrete barrier which physically divided the city between east and west, and Jews did not return to the Old City of Jerusalem until 1967 in the wake of the Six Day War. Israel was the first ruling power to pass a law protecting Holy Sites and legally enshrining the status quo on such from Ottoman times.

Since then Jerusalem has grown rapidly both physically and overwhelmingly in terms of centers of Jewish learning, study and culture. However as noted, the history of Jerusalem and Jewish experience in it, for most of history, has reflected the jealous competition of nations and religions for Jerusalem's embrace. The ongoing tensions in Jerusalem today against the background of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict have only exacerbated competition over Jerusalem, denying it the hope for the peace that its name embodies.

A well-known statement of the ancient Jewish sages declares that "ten portions of beauty came down to the world – nine went to Jerusalem and one to the rest of the world." All who love Jerusalem have no doubt of the veracity of this comment. For Jerusalem's beauty, like any lasting beauty, is far more than skin deep. While the city

has a lovely external aspect, its beauty is precisely the spiritual beauty that reflects the depths of devotion that made Jerusalem so significant to so many from the Traditions of Abraham – Jews, Christians and Muslims.

Less well known is the continuation of the aforementioned comment which adds "ten portions of pain came down to the world – nine went to Jerusalem and one to the rest of the world" – a statement that reflects the aforementioned historical reality of blood and tears that has predominantly been the fate of Jerusalem and her peoples.

As indicated, the ultimate vision for Jerusalem as envisaged by the Prophets and Sages, anticipates the final realization of Jerusalem's name as city of peace, in which it will no longer be a city of pain, but only of beauty and joy (Psalm 48:3; Exodus Rabbah, 52). However in order to facilitate this vision, the different communities that love Jerusalem will need to see its diversity as its beauty; and to seek to live together in mutual respect above and beyond our differences. Then we will achieve "the peace of Jerusalem" and "all who truly love Jerusalem will prosper". (Psalm 122:6)